41 Carawan & Carawan B,Z-5 (1959-1988) 1989
NN23 Sea Islanders NN23
South Carolina
Johns Island

Mr. Abraham Jenkins

THE PEOPLE WERE TREATED SO BADLY

Prior to the establishment of the Sea Island Comprehensive Health Care Corporation there was no medical care on the islands and everybody had to go to the emergency room in Charleston. The people were treated so badly by the nurses and sometimes the physicians. It was segregated there. And many people died trying to get to medical care waiting on the bridges to open and close.

My father was a fighter. In my case, I retired as a major in the air force in 1971 and moved back home. I figured I'd come back to give my daddy help. I was in a position to help him do some things. I grew up around this work and I guess I would have come back eventually. I spoke to my daddy. He never said I should come back, but just the way he spoke, I knew I should. After talking to some other people, I knew the work needed to be done. When I looked at the groundwork that had been laid by these people, and saw the intensity of their effort and how much sacrifice had been made, I know I said to myself, "I gave the military twenty years, I can give Sea Island twenty." Several of us started trying to put a health program together for the islands.

Mr. Abraham Jenkins

PEOPLE STARTED SEEING THE BIGGER PICTURE

Our community consists of the sea islands west and south of Charleston—five islands altogether. So when we started looking at the needs of the people, we tried to organize a local health council on each of these islands. Either we created or we got to be a part of an existing organization on each island. We started getting input from all of the islands and we started trying to meet their needs. We eventually started dealing with environmental issues, social work, health education, and nutrition.

When some people became interested in the problems of migrant workers on the islands, Rev. Goodwin, my daddy, Bill Saunders, McKinley Washington, and others said, "Well, it's all right to be doing something for the migrants, but whatever the migrants are experiencing for six or eight weeks, the people on the islands are experiencing for the whole year. So whatever we do, it should not be limited just to the migrants." Some of the first issues that were identified were health issues.

They decided they needed to form a rural organization that would deal with these problems the people were having. That was the beginning of Rural Missions, Inc. It started out of the Progressive Club and was formed to address local issues on Johns Island. But then people started seeing the bigger picture and the similarity of the situation on the other islands.